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LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN POPULATION GROWING, BECOMING MORE GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED

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The Lithuanian-American population in the United States grew by over 69,000 during the 1980s, and now numbers 811,865 persons, according to the 1990 census. This increase of almost 10 percent is only slightly less than the increase in the U.S. population as a whole.

Persons of Lithuanian-American ancestry account for about .3 percent of the U.S. population, and make up the 37th largest ancestry group in the country.

The census also reported that there are almost 9.4 million Americans of Polish descent, 100,331 of Latvian descent; and 26,762 of Estonian descent.

The three states with the largest Lithuanian-American population in 1980—Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New York—continue to be the leading states in 1990. One out of every three Lithuanian-Americans lives in these three states. However, all three actually lost Lithuanian population over the decade.

Lithuanians, like other Americans, are moving out of the Northeast and Midwest and are heading South and West. This trend mirrors, to a large extent, national demographic trends.

The largest numerical increase of Lithuanian Americans took place in Florida, which showed a gain of over 13,000 persons, representing an increase of 47 percent in the Lithuanian-American population. California came in second with 11,050 persons, followed by Texas with 4,700 persons. Interestingly enough, when looking at general U.S. population trends, these three states likewise showed the largest increases in the U.S. population over the decade. In fact, California, Florida, and Texas alone accounted for one-half the total population growth in the country between 1980 and 1990. They accounted for 42 percent of the increase in the Lithuanian-American population.

In terms of percent change over the decade, we see growth in states where the Lithuanian-American population had been extremely small: namely states in the South and the West. South Carolina more than doubled its Lithuanian population and had the largest percent increase of any state, 118 percent. However, South Carolina, like many Southern and Western states had small bases to begin with. South Carolina's total Lithuanian American population in 1990 was only 2,673 despite adding over 1,000 Lithuanian-Americans during the ten-year period. The Lithuanian population of Georgia, Alaska, and North Carolina also doubled over the decade. There were also large percent changes in many Southern states, including Tennessee (78 percent), Alabama (71 percent), Oklahoma (57 percent), Mississippi (56 percent), Louisiana (44 percent), and Virginia (44 percent).

States losing Lithuanian-Americans included the three states of Illinois, Pennsylvania and New York, as well as Connecticut, South Dakota, and Wyoming. With the exception of Connecticut, the general population in all these states grew only slightly between 1980 and 1990. Wyoming actually lost population over the decade.

The overall increase in the Lithuanian-American population can be attributed to two major factors: natural increase (that is, the difference between births and deaths), and increased awareness and identification with the Lithuanian nationality. The 1990 census was taken on April 1, only several weeks after Lithuanian's March 11th reassertion of its independence from the Soviet Union. The media attention focused on Lithuania may have prompted some persons to list Lithuanian as an ancestry, however remote.

Immigration—another component of population change—has had a minimal effect, if any, on the increase of Lithuanian-Americans. The number of Lithuanian-Americans not born in the U.S. showed a significant decline during the 1980s, decreasing from 48,194 in 1980 to 30,334 in 1990, a decline of 37 percent. Just thirty years ago, this number stood at 403,000.

The 1990 census was only the second census to ask a person's ancestry; as a result there are comparable data only back to 1980.

These trends are illustrated in the chart and maps that follow.

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